

Week of Gaudete (Advent 3)

First recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the weekly section of the Small Catechism. Then read the Proper and assigned Scripture reading followed by the devotion. Conclude with singing the hymn of the week.



Weekly Catechism section: *Third Commandment and Meaning (Luther's Small Catechism)*

Hymn of the Week: *Arise, Sons of the Kingdom (TLH 69)*

Monday - Introit (Philippians 4:4-5; Psalm 85:1-2, 6, 8)

Read Psalm 85.

With their dear teacher in prison, John the Baptist's disciples did not seem to have much reason to rejoice. But he pointed them to Jesus, since Jesus is the only way that one can truly rejoice in the midst of hardships. *Gaudete!* means "Rejoice!" We get this from Paul's words to the Philippians (chapter 4), which are included in our Introit:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice... The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What comfort! When our Lord tells us not to be anxious about our life (Matthew 6:25), he isn't giving us a new law to follow. Jesus' very words give us the peace by which we rejoice. It is as St. Paul says in Romans 5:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings...

Our Lord gave sight to the blind, and he made the lame walk and the deaf hear. He cleansed the lepers and raised the dead. And he preached the gospel to the poor (Matt 11:5-6). If you have the gospel preached to you, a poor and miserable sinner, then you have everything. If you have been counted righteous before God through faith in Jesus who died for you sins, then you have peace with God even in the midst of having nothing. Whether you lose your sight, your hearing, or your ability to walk, or death crowches at your door, you have everything in Christ Jesus, who is your Savior from sin, death, and hell. So rejoice! And again I say, rejoice!

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Tuesday - Old Testament Lesson (Malachi 3:1-6)

Read Malachi 3.

Malachi prophesied that God would send his messenger to prepare his way. The New Testament clearly shows that John the Baptist is the fulfillment of this messenger, and he prepares the way for Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is God. But why is this so important? Because only God can save us. St. Paul says (Rom 8:3), "What the law could not do, being weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin, to condemn sin in the flesh." The Father sent his only begotten Son to fulfill what the law could not fulfill. He did this by bearing in his own flesh the condemnation of our sin. He fulfilled all righteousness, just as he told John the Baptist at his Baptism (Matt 3:15). It was necessary for Jesus to be baptized as a sinner, even though he himself was righteous, so that he might take the place of every sinner. And in exchange he gives us his righteousness. Again, as St. Paul says, the law could not accomplish this. This wasn't because the law was not God's good will, but it was because of our sinful flesh. So the law was given to show us this weakness of our corruption.

The sons of Levi were the priests of God who performed the sacrifices instituted in the law of Moses. Such sacrifices served as a guardian with the rest of the law to lead God's people to repentance so that they would depend not on themselves but only on his compassion. And yet the law itself could not save them. The law was weakened by the flesh. The Levites were therefore weakened by the flesh. Their sacrifices were in and of themselves aromas of death. But the Lord Jesus actually accomplished what John the Baptist and all the other prophets foretold. Jesus actually accomplished what the law required but could not attain. He offered not the blood of goats and bulls, but his own innocent, divine blood. And in this way he purified the sons of Levi by doing what they could not possibly do. He gave an offering that was eternally pleasing to God, not simply for outward washing, but to cleanse our conscience, to give us peace with God forever by turning his wrath away. So while his law still speaks against adulterers, the greedy, and idolators, Christ gives us what the law can't give. He purifies us. This promise does not change. Therefore we are not consumed.

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Wednesday - Gradual (Psalm 80:1-2)

Read Psalm 80.

Our Gradual is a repetition of a portion of last Sunday's Introit, taken from Psalm 80: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!" It is always good for us to be reminded that God is our Shepherd, especially since Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, ascribing to himself a divine name. But this Sunday of Gaudete, the third Sunday in Advent, we consider Christ as the Coming One. After all, we rejoice, because the Lord is at hand. So our Gradual begins with the words that follow in Psalm 80: "You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth! Stir up your strength and come!" The Coming One is God himself. I recently read from a book that though early Christians taught that the Coming One was another title for the Messiah, it is more properly a title for God. But that's the point! The Messiah is God! He who dwells between the cherubim is the Lord of hosts (Is 37:16).

When God gave the instructions for the constructions of the ark of the covenant, he also gave instructions for the construction of the covering of this ark. It is known as the mercy seat, or the atonement covering. This was where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people (Lev 16). On this atonement covering were sculptures of two cherubim, angels who see the face of God. God told Moses that between these cherubim he would meet with him and speak with him (Exod 25:22). This God, who dwells between the cherubim, stirs up his strength and comes. He shines forth. God is the coming Messiah. And what does God, the Messiah, come to do? He comes to make atonement (Ps 65:3). When God appeared to Isaiah between the cherubim singing, "Holy Holy Holy," he revealed to the terrified prophet that he has atoned for his sins by the sacrifice on the altar (Is 6). This is what the God who dwells between the cherubim does. He makes atonement. So look at what Jesus did and see who he is. He came to heal the deaf, blind, lame, and unclean, to raise the dead, to bear our sins -- to make atonement -- so that this gospel might be proclaimed to the poor in spirit. He is the Coming One. We don't wait for another.

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Thursday - Epistle (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

Read 1 Corinthians 4.

St. Paul describes himself and his other ministers as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. This is what pastors are, and how they should be regarded. It is important for all of us, both pastors and hearers,

to reflect on this, especially during the Advent season. Here, we focus on receiving Christ, who comes to us in the mystery of his Word and Sacraments! It is required of such stewards to be found faithful. If you know this and you expect this of your pastor, then it will be of great benefit to you and to him. A steward is given charge over something that belongs to someone else. God gives his ministers charge over his Word, to handle it rightly (2 Tim 2:15), calling to repentance those who need repentance, and comforting with the gospel those who mourn over their sins. He admits to the Lord's altar those who confess the truth, especially the truth of their own sins, and he bars those who refuse to confess such truth.

In all of this, it is the minister's duty to point his hearers to the only true God, to Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This doesn't mean that he and his hearers will see great results in this life. We do not judge the fruits of the ministry by a human court, looking at the growth of the congregation or even at how happy and excited people are about their new or old pastor. Rather, the benefits of the ministry are hidden until the day that the Lord returns. Faith is hidden in our hearts, as love toward one another and hope in our inheritance are strengthened. We walk by faith and not by sight as we listen to the testimony of John the Baptist and the other prophets, along with the teaching of the apostles. The hidden counsels of the heart will be revealed on the last day. In the meantime, it is necessary that God's Word be proclaimed, that stubborn, unrepentant sinners be warned, and that the contrite heart be comforted. It is a profound mystery that God would accomplish all of this through the preaching of a sinful man and under the humility of water, bread, and wine. But remember that this is the same God who purchased you through the lowly birth and death of his only Son. May we receive such mystery in true faith!

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Friday - Alleluia (Psalm 80:2)

Read Psalm 80 again.

The *Alleluia verse* is a repetition of the *Gradual*, taken from Psalm 80. Here, we ask God to stir up his strength and come. Continuing the main theme of Advent, we anticipate the coming of our Lord. This Sunday, we focus on God sending his prophets to prepare the way for Christ. Specifically, we focus on John the Baptist. St. Paul talks about the ministry and duty given to him and all other ministers of the Word in 1 Corinthians 4. So now the *Alleluia* prepares us for the words of our Lord, Jesus. The *Gradual* only included the words, "Stir up your strength and come." Now, the *Alleluia* completes the prayer: "Stir up your strength,

and come and save us!" Here is the main message of all prophets, apostles, and ministers to proclaim. Here is the confession of every Christian tongue to sing and on which to stand. It is the reason for why God comes. He came in the flesh to save us from sin, death, and hell. And he comes through his ministry of the gospel to guard us with that same salvation. So just as this remains the central message for the church, it also remains the central prayer of the church.

John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the one who was to come or if they should wait for another. We might wonder whether John was simply sending his disciples to Jesus or if John himself actually had doubts. Either way, John's ministry serves its purpose. Either way, he is a vessel of clay holding a great treasure. John's ministry doesn't depend on him. In fact, it increases as he decreases (John 3:30). This is because John's ministry is the ministry of Christ. It is the ministry of the Gospel. And blessed are those who are not offended by this ministry of Christ! Because they recognize his true power. It isn't to wow the crowds nor merely to add a little touch of beauty and culture to society. It is, rather, the power to save. Whether we are called to preach it or we are called to confess it, there is nothing greater than a bold proclamation of this truth. Yet even greater than this is the lowly ear that hears it and the broken heart that takes comfort in it. Even greater than the most bold witnesses to Christ and his salvation are those who recognize their weakness and ask God to stir up his strength, come, and save.

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Saturday - Gospel (Matthew 11:2-11)

Read John 3:22-36

Even as he faced death, sitting in prison, John the Baptist pointed his disciples to Jesus. And why did he do this? He explains in John 3:30, "He must increase, and I must decrease." So he pointed his hearers away from himself to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?" He didn't say, "Or should I look for another?" John knew who Jesus was. He prepared his way. He taught about him. He read his Scriptures. So he did what he always did. He directed his students to Jesus. So they asked him, "Should we look for another?" Jesus answered them, but he told them to tell John his answer: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf

hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

You see what Christ has done here? He has increased. He has taken over as the preacher of the gospel. He fulfilled the words of the prophets by curing the blind and the deaf, making the lame walk, and raising the dead (Is. 26:19; 29:18; 35:4-6). Just as Elijah prepared the way for Elisha who, by the will of God, cleansed Naaman of his leprosy, John, in the spirit of Elijah, prepared the way of Jesus who, by his own will, cleansed the lepers (Matt 8:3). And so he preaches the good news to John, the great prophet of God, who has decreased to the least in the kingdom, sitting in a dungeon and awaiting his death. As was Elijah on mount Horeb, John is comforted by God himself. So it is today that faithful preachers are comforted by the very gospel they proclaim when they find salvation from sin in the healing death of Christ. They are not offended by the idea that they also need it. They aren't above it. With Timothy, they are saved by the same doctrine by which they save others (1 Tim 4:16). Mothers and fathers likewise are comforted by their own children to whom they teach the gospel when they hear from them as from Christ himself, "Jesus died for us." Indeed, the least in the kingdom take great comfort in what the greatest proclaim.

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Arise, Sons of the Kingdom

Luke 19: 38

Auf, auf, ihr Reichsgenossen

Johann Rist, 1651, cento

Tr. based on Catherine Winkworth, 1858

7. 6. 7. 6. 6. 7. 7. 6.

Aus meines Herzens Grunde
"Neu Catechismus-Gesangbüchlein"
Hamburg, 1598

1 A - rise, sons of the King - dom! The King is draw-ing nigh;
2 A - rise, ye droop-ing mourn-ers! The King is ver - y near;
3 A - rise, ye much af - flict - ed! The King is not a - far.
4 A - rise, ye poor and need - y! The King pro - vides for you;

A - rise and hail with glad - ness The Ru - ler from on high.
A - way with grief and sor - row! For, lo, your Help is here.
Re-joice, ye long de - ject - ed, Be - hold the Morn-ing Star!
He comes with suc - cor speed - y, With mer - cy ev - er new.

Ye Chris-tians, hast-en forth! Your praise and hom-age bring Him
Be - hold, in man - y a place— Oh, bless - ed con - so - la - tion!—
The Lord will give you joy; Tho' trou-bles now dis-tress you,
Re-ceive your gra-cious King, The Giv - er of all bless-ing,

And glad ho-san-nas sing Him; Naught else your love is worth.
You find Him, your Sal - va - tion, With - in His means of grace.
With com-fort He will bless you, E'en death will He de-stroy.
Hail Him, His name con-fess - ing, And glad ho-san-nas sing. A-men.

Arise, Sons of the Kingdom

5 Be righteous, ye His subjects,
The King is just and true;
Prepare for Him a highway,
Make all things straight and new.
For, lo, He means it well;
Then willing bear the crosses
That He Himself imposes,
Nor let your courage fail.

6 Oh, rich the gifts Thou bringest,
Thyself made poor and weak!
O Love beyond expression,
That thus can sinners seek!
For this, O Lord, will we
Our joyous tribute bring Thee
And glad hosannas sing Thee
And ever grateful be.